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SUBJECT: SLOVAK LOCAL ELECTION RESULTS: LOCAL POLITICS ARE
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[B](#). BRATISLAVA 914

[C](#). BRATISLAVA 823

[1](#). (SBU) SUMMARY. Slovakia's nationwide December 2 municipal elections demonstrated that Slovaks care about local politics and that the national-level political scene does not strongly influence the selection of local leaders. Most - but not all - major political parties were satisfied with the results as they managed, in one manner of counting or another, to gain local seats. Independent candidates also fared well. Prime Minister Robert Fico probably believes he comes out of the elections with even more leverage over his troublesome coalition partners: SNS (Slovak National Party) and HZDS (Movement for Democratic Slovakia). One surprise upset: the unseating of Jan Slota, four-time mayor of Zilina and controversial head of SNS, who may now have more time to spend on the national scene. Romani candidates did not have a good success rate overall, but made some small steps forward. END SUMMARY.

SLOVAKS - LESS APATHETIC THAN EXPECTED

[2](#). (SBU) At 48 percent, voter turnout in Slovakia's nationwide local elections for mayors and city council members on December 2 surpassed expected participation. Though PM Fico declared the elections a victory for his Smer party, in fact most of the parliamentary parties fared well and expressed satisfaction with the results. HZDS is the exception, as it lost nearly half of its mayoral seats. Smer, HZDS, and SNS candidates now account for 1011 mayors. Opposition parties SDKU (Slovak Democratic and Christian Union), SMK (Party of the Hungarian Coalition), and KDH (Christian Democratic Movement) have 575 mayors. On the whole, center-right opposition candidates fared better in larger cities and towns, including Bratislava and Kosice, meaning that despite the smaller number of mayoral seats won, a reasonable estimate would show that opposition mayors represent a similar percentage of the overall population as coalition mayors. Independent candidates won 895 posts. In an out-of-nowhere story, independent candidate Pavol Hagyari, a well-known lawyer in Bratislava, defeated an independent incumbent and four party-affiliated candidates to win a resounding victory in Presov, the country's third largest city. (For background on candidates, issues, and structure of Slovakia's local elections, see refs A and B.)

[3](#). (SBU) Slovak voters, who have the chance to elect local leaders once every four years, showed that local politics remain local, despite the record-high popularity of Fico and Smer at the national level. In many cases, local candidates were supported by a mix of parties that did not reflect the national level coalition and opposition groupings. In Bratislava, for example, re-elected mayor Andrej Durkovsky had the support of KDH and SDKU but SMK joined Smer and HZDS in backing Smer party member Monika Benova-Flasikova. At the

town council level, a surprising thirty Romani candidates across numerous small villages ran solely on behalf of the far-right and often racist SNS. Election observers overheard voters talk about local issues, such as cleaning up a cemetery, while heading to the polls.

14. (SBU) The voter turnout, coalition mixes, and results show that Slovak voters care about local issues and can easily distinguish local versus national politics. Though some Smer candidates probably received a bump from the belief that connections to the national coalition could help a municipality, this was not a significant factor. Elections monitors, primarily the NGO "Civic Eye", noted a few irregularities but not to the extent that the elections could be called into question. Some vote buying was reported in a few of the poorest Romani areas, including Krompachy and Spisske Nova Ves.

ZILINA SAYS "SO LONG, SLOTA"

15. (SBU) A united opposition and vocal campaign spurred the biggest surprise of the elections. Ivan Harman, former General Secretary of SDKU and currently backed by four parties and numerous civic groups, upset incumbent Jan Slota to become mayor of Zilina, Slovakia's fifth largest city and home to the new KIA car factory. Slota, the controversial head of SNS known for his racist statements, was overly confident (and perhaps preoccupied with his son's serious case of malaria) and made almost no effort to campaign. The mayor-elect announced that he will conduct an investigation into the city's finances from the past four terms of Slota's administration.

16. (SBU) The loss hurts Slota's credibility and stature. He lashed out theatrically against his city, proclaiming that

BRATISLAVA 00000952 002 OF 002

Zilina citizens will lose significant benefits he could have brought them based on SNS's control of three national level ministries, which control billions of euros worth of structural funds (ref C). However, less than a week after the election, KIA announced it will increase its investment in Zilina. Some observers speculate that, with more time to focus on national politics, Slota's statements may become even more radicalized and he may be more difficult for Fico to control. On the other hand, Slota may not want to rock the boat too much because of his ministers' control over financial flows and his need to maintain enough credibility for SNS to be re-elected to the national parliament four years hence. (NOTE: Slota could have a personal interest maintaining his parliamentary immunity to protect himself from potential prosecution based on investigation into his 16-year administration of Zilina. END NOTE.) At any rate, Slota continues to have significant business interests in Zilina, so he cannot completely abandon the local scene for the national one.

17. (SBU) Slota's loss and HZDS's loss of several mayors led one HZDS official to predict that PM Fico would show less flexibility towards her party because of Smer's stronger showing in comparison to that its partners. She said that party officials initiated a "lessons learned" assessment of their campaign.

NON-ROMA CAN SUPPORT ROMA CANDIDATES

18. (SBU) Outside of Kosice, which has one council district composed of entirely of a Roma housing settlement, the largest town to vote in a Romani city council member was Levoca, population approximately 15,000. The results were disappointing for Romani candidates in larger cities, such as Presov and Banska Bystrica, but even losing candidates learned useful lessons. Several candidates who went door-to-door campaigning in the non-Roma part of their council districts received a surprising number of non-Roma votes. These candidates found that many non-Roma agreed that

their towns, having a significant Roma population, needed Romani town council members to help work on Romani issues. It appears that some of them were just waiting for a qualified candidate to introduce himself. A Romani candidate in Presov, for example, estimates that half the votes he received were from non-Roma voters. He intends to spend more time campaigning in non-Roma neighborhoods next time around. Other unsuccessful candidates noted that their involvement with political parties or networks of independent politicians has increased their access and cooperation with those who did win, enabling them to have a greater impact on local issues even without sitting on a council.

19. (SBU) In the village of Zehra, population under 2000 inhabitants - about three-quarters of whom are Roma living in a segregated settlement of so-called "social housing" that the government built for them five kilometers outside the town, the new mayor and entire town council are Romani. The mayor-elect designed a campaign specifically to appeal to Roma voters. He created a billboard showing him shaking hands with his older brother, a deceased community leader. The caption read "Brother, I give you my strength." Romani communities have significant respect for the dead, so this strategy helped to overcome the jealousies and family divides that often split Romani votes. The concern is that the billboard had been photo-shopped together, but many people in the settlement were too naive to realize that modern technology was involved and believed that the older brother had come back from the dead to take a picture and support the mayoral candidate.

VALLEE